DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 092 254 PS 007 396

AUTHOR Greenberg, Selma B.; Peck, Lucy F.
TITLE A Study of Preschoolers' Spontaneous Social Interaction Patterns in Three Settings: All Female, All Male and Coed.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 4p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (59th Chicago, Illinois, April 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Behavioral Science Research; *Behavior Patterns; Peer Relationship; *Preschool Children; *Sex Role; *Social Behavior

ABSTRACT

This study investigated sex role behaviors, perceptions, and aspiration levels in 3- 4-, and 5-year-old children. Focus was on social interaction in situations free of adult attention. Six parties were conducted and videotaped in the familiar setting of the preschool classroom. Seventy-seven preschoolers attended these parties which were composed of all girls, all boys, or a mixture of both sexes. Analysis of data did indicate that differential social behavior patterns were exhibited by various groups. Results are discussed in terms of implications for educational strategies. (DP)

ED 092254

25.11

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

MAY 1 1974

"A Study of Preschoolers' Spontaneous Social Interaction Patterns in Three Settings: All Female, All Male and Coed."

PS 007396

Selma B. Greenberg
Associate Professor
Department of Elementary Education
Hofstra University

Lucy F. Peck
Assistant Professor
Department of Elementary Education
Hofstra University

AERA Convention
Chicago, 1974

This paper reports on a study which was one of a series begun in 1971 and undertaken at the Hofstra University Child Development Center. The focus of these studies was on sex role behaviors, perceptions and aspiration levels in 3, 4 and 5-year old children. This series of studies was designed both to reveal children's attitudes and behaviors and to provide data which will lead to revised curricula and instructional practice.

In this study our primary objective was to gather data on preschool children's typical social interactive patterns in a setting free of adult direction. Our secondary objective was to ascertain whether these patterns were differentiated by sex.

Theoretical Framework: The literature on social learning indicates that autonomous, independent and assertive behaviors are necessary for success in school and later vocational endeavors. Accepting the notion that these behaviors are necessary for school and vocational success we attempted to ascertain if one could observe different levels of these behaviors in a relatively unstructured group situation in preschool children. Further, we wished to test two related assumptions, one being that these behaviors are more frequently and regularly developed in boys, (see Frazier and Sadker, "Sexism in School and Society"), and second that by preschool age, children already had incorporated stereotypic notions of appropriate social, sex role behavior. (see Maccoby).

Sample: 77 middle class children enrolled in a private preschool program located on a university campus.

Method and Techniques: In order to gather information on children's social interactive patterns we constructed a situation in which it would be possible to observe children's spontaneous social interactions without adult direction. We conducted and videotaped a series of 6-30 minute parties for the children. It was our contention that the environment created by a party setting would maximize pleasure and elicit spontaneous, normal social patterns of behavior on the part of the participants. We called the series of parties "Interaction Parties". Because we wished to test the notion that children's social interactive patterns may be differentiated by sex, and we wished to observe girls interacting without the presence of boys, and boys interacting without the presence of girls, and boys and girls interacting together, we conducted and videotaped a series of six parties -- two all girl parties, two all boy parties, and two coed parties. Our total sample of girls was 35 and our total sample of boys was 42. The parties were conducted in the familiar setting of the preschool classroom during the second month of the school year. The teachers and

other adults generally present in the classroom setting (observers, student teachers, aides) were excluded from the party setting. Tables and chairs were moved to one section of one large classroom and an overhead microphone and video camera were placed inconspicuously in the corner. Party favors, balloons, blowers, cups and plates were set for each child. Candies, cakes, and pitchers of milk were provided in the center of each table. On the day before the first party the children were informed by their teachers that on the next day the girls would be having a party, and on the day following the boys would have the same privilege. The following week the children were told by their teachers that they all would be having a Thanksgiving party.

Before entering the videotaping room each child received a large paper hat with his/her name printed on it. This strategy permitted the researchers to identify behaviors of individual subjects. The videotaping began as the first child entered the room. One of the authors greeted the children as they entered and informed them that they were free to select any seat they wished. No other instructions were given. The authors remained out of camera range as did two research assistants who observed and recorded the conversations and physical movement of the children. It was our intent to interact as little as possible with the children. Thus, we responded only to requests for assistance and initiated action only when a child appeared in danger.

Data Source: In addition to our comprehensive study of the tapes as a whole we developed a method for a more rigorous inspection of the data. We stopped the videotape every two minutes and inspected the still segment of tape to observe the following:

the number of subjects pictured
the percentage seated
the percentage standing and/or in motion
the percentage interacting.

The table below represents the result of this analysis:

	Girls	Co-ed	Boys
No. of subjects pictured	113	143	91
% seated	74%	75%	51%
% standing and/or in motion	31%	23%	55%
% Interacting	12%	17%	25%

Results and/or Conclusions: Differential social interactive behavior patterns were exhibited by groups. During the all girl parties and coed parties more sitting, less interacting, less standing and moving behaviors were exhibited than during the all boy parties. Our early conclusions based on observations

made at the time of the "Interaction Parties" and later from a careful study of the tapes was that the children generally were orderly and capable of functioning with a minimal amount of adult direction and supervision. However, our observations revealed that the boys showed more independent, assertive and autonomous behavior in that they asked for less help, initiated activities more frequently, and left the party area without seeking permission. At some of the parties some boys became destructive of objects in the room, and began fighting with each other. The girls behavior was more restrained, more orderly, and more dependent upon adults as evidenced in their numerous requests for adult assistance. During the coed parties we observed that the boys and girls tended to modify the extremes of each others behavior. Thus, there was less gross destructive behavior by the boys and greater independent behavior by the girls. Since we had initially instructed our filmer to follow those children who moved, our numerical study is somewhat inconsistent with our live observations since the tapes reflect the bias we initiated.

In assessing what was observed "live" and on videotape, the following questions are suggested:

1) Was the choice of a party setting "neutral" or did its social nature call forth already incorporated, learned, sex-stereotyped social behavior?

   We are presently engaged in a study designed to explore this question further. Working again with very young children we have, however, broadened our sample base to include a larger population from differing social classes.

2) Are the differential patterns of observed social interactive behaviors exhibited by some boys and girls the products of differential child rearing practices, innate physiological differences, or an interaction of the two?

Educational or Scientific Implications: Schools have typically attended to those students who exhibit an over abundance of assertive, independent and autonomous behavior. The absence of these behaviors however, has not, in the past, signalled a need for attention on the part of the school authorities. However, if we are to accept the notion that the presence of a healthy amount of assertive, independent and autonomous behavior is not only desireable but necessary for school and vocational success, schools will have to focus as much attention and energy on those who exhibit too few of these behaviors (at present mostly girls) as they do on those who exhibit an inappropriate amount or number of these behaviors (at present mostly boys).